

Annual DEFY Summer Camp Opens at JBAB

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WASHINGTON – Naval Support Activity (NSA) Washington kicked off its fourth Drug Education For Youth (DEFY) camp at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling (JBAB), July 14 for 9-12 year-old children of military and Department of Defense employees and contractors.

The eight-day camp marked the first phase of the program, which is designed to foster positive relationships between the children and role models, and to discourage drug use and gang involvement.

Camp mentors—volunteer Sailors—continue to meet with the youth one weekend per month throughout the remainder of the year during the second phase to continue progress and further build those relationships.

"They come to the program and we inspire them," said Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Lakeisha Henderson, local program coordinator for DEFY. "Because of this program, they come back every year and they just learn. They just want to do more."

The first day began with a spirited game of dodgeball with a small group before moving into a nearby classroom for lessons on teamwork and respect. Participants were divided into pairs or groups, where they freshened up on social skills while co-designing flags representing their group interests.

Later in the camp, the youth learned about dog obedience with the Naval District Washington K9 working dog team, watched a demonstration from the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard, learned how to properly fold flags, and took a field trip to the National Zoo.

Henderson said the key to the camp is basing everything around educating the children and always keeping them busy.

"Our job is to mentor them and just to help get involved with them as far as learning things about themselves and keeping them active," she said. The experiences throughout the camp and later phases provide the necessary tools for the youth to grow and learn, she added.

Learning and growing does not just happen for the youth participants, however.

"They help me," Henderson said. "I don't have children, and really don't work with children a lot, but it's fun working with them. It's awesome for me."

Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Andrew Chaplik, from NSA Washington Port Ops, returned this year for another opportunity to be a mentor after having a positive experience last year.

"I just like working with the kids," said Chaplik, who has seen children of that age already using drugs. "As we work with



Drug Education For Youth (DEFY) camp participants design flags representing them as pairs or teams during a classroom session on the first day of the camp at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, July 14. Sailors volunteered as mentors during the eight-day camp, which is aimed at building positive relationships between role models and children ages 9-12. (Photo by Shawn Miller)

the kids throughout the year, you see how they're doing and see that they're not doing drugs."

Some of the participants even expressed interest in eventually entering the military because of the experience in DEFY and experiences with the mentors, Henderson noted.

We're not necessarily trying to get them to go to the military because we just volunteer, but they actually go back and help in their community as well," she said. "That's how everybody else hears about DEFY."

Following the conclusion of the second phase of the program, DEFY mentors encourage parents to become actively involved in maintaining the gains made during the previous year, and work on outplacement to get their students enrolled in follow-up programs.

DEFY was developed by the Department of the Navy's Drug Demand Reduction Task Force, who hosted the first camp for 13 children in 1993. Since then, DEFY has spread to more than 50 sites worldwide, helping hundreds of children stay away from drugs.

For more information about the program or to receive an application to volunteer, contact Henderson at (646) 505-7041 or (202) 685-1200, or Machinist's Mate 1st Class Mary Moro at (202) 685-1200.

For more news and information from around Naval District Washington, visit www.NavDistWash.org.